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UNCLAS AMMAN 004251

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: PLANS FOR MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS MOVE FORWARD,  
DESPITE OBJECTIONS

REF: AMMAN 4189

1. A controversial amendment to Jordan,s Municipal Law has come under fire from nearly a third of the members of the country,s newly elected parliament. Between 30 and 40 MPs have signed and circulated a petition calling on the government to delay the country,s municipal elections, scheduled for July 26. They plan to present the petition to the government once Parliament convenes on 16 July.

2. The November 2002 temporary law authorizes the government to appoint mayors and up to half of the council members in the country,s 99 municipalities. The petition drive is being spearheaded by Islamic Action Front (IAF) MPs, whose party recently announced its intentions to boycott all municipal elections outside Amman (reported reftel). All 18 IAF MPs, in addition to a number of independent members, have lent their signatures to this initiative.

3. Despite the protest, Municipal, Rural, and Environmental Affairs Minister Abdul Razzaq Tbeishat announced that the government would proceed with its preparations for municipal elections and hold them as scheduled. Having not seen the petition himself, the minister refused to comment on it. He stressed that the amendment to the Municipal Law in November 2002, one of hundreds of &temporary laws8 promulgated by GOJ while Parliament was dissolved, was part of a comprehensive restructuring plan for the financially strapped and administratively challenged municipal sector. The government began the plan in 2001, securing additional funds for municipalities and reducing their number by more than two-thirds.

4. Contrary to rumors ripe in the capital, &no appointments (to municipal councils) have been made so far,8 insisted Tbeishat. He said the government had decided to appoint 460 members, including mayors, and give the public a chance to elect 536 members. Before last year,s amendment, mayors and all municipal council members were elected. The government has rebuffed critics of its amendment, arguing the measure had to be adopted as part of its municipal restructuring program to make municipalities both financially viable and more responsive to public needs.

GNEHM